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SAN LEANDRO

SHOULD WE MERGE CITY AND COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENTS?

Recent events in California have emphasized how important it is to have well-coordinated fire, emergency medical, and disaster preparedness services.

The City of San Leandro and the County of Alameda have an excellent opportunity to make ***significant improvements*** *in their emergency service capacity, while at the same time* ***reducing costs to residents.***

The City of San Leandro has completed Phase 2 of an in-depth study to determine the viability of entering into a joint services agreement with the County of Alameda to provide joint fire protection services to the residents of the City and County.

This brochure highlights the findings of that study and answers the most common questions and concerns.

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CONSOLIDATION OF CITY AND COUNTY FIRE SERVICES

Why is the City considering a different structure for fire service?

- Because fire service is so essential, yet so expensive to provide, the search for a more efficient and effective framework is underway in many places on the West Coast. It is not an exaggeration to say that the organizational structure for emergency fire service is in the process of being "reinvented" in communities all over the nation.
- Labor, management, and elected officials are working together to streamline operations while maintaining a highly responsive level of service. Major consolidation and regional fire service delivery evaluations are presently underway in numerous counties and cities in Southern California, the Northwest and the San Francisco Bay Area — including the Alameda County Regional Fire District.
- San Leandro is a step ahead of most cities because it has already specifically evaluated advantages and disadvantages for combining city and county fire services. The cities of Fremont and Union City are also considering the integration of their fire departments. The cities of Dublin, Livermore, Pleasanton and San Ramon are currently investigating ways to share services, too. In fact, nearly every city in Alameda County is considering some new form of fire service.

Are there practical benefits of combining the City and County fire service programs?

Yes, there are. Simply put, a combined City and County fire service delivery system will be able to provide a higher level of high quality emergency service to the residents of San Leandro at a lower cost. Annual savings in administrative costs are estimated to range from $700,000 to $900,000 while overall service — including emergency responses and broad availability of necessary equipment — will be improved.

How can improved service cost less?

By eliminating duplicate operating costs, the City and County can each save money. A combined management structure will allow the City and County to share outlays for administrative services, such as clerical staff, and thereby reduce this cost for each. Fire apparatus and other equipment can be merged resulting in additional cost savings.

Will response times be maintained?

- Yes. Responsiveness is measured by how long it takes to place fire fighters and equipment at the scene of an emergency. It is more likely that service levels to both County and City residents will actually increase due to increased availability of fire fighters and equipment and more deployment options for these resources.
- Emergency responses will be dispatched from one central office, enabling the dispatchers to immediately call on any and all available personnel and equipment. For example, when service area boundaries are dropped between the two jurisdictions, first-in assignments for fire companies can be set based on shortest response times rather than arbitrary service area boundaries.

What is the alternative to combining services?

Due to past actions of the City Council, San Leandro's Sixth Engine Company will be eliminated by January 1, 1995. A combined City and County fire service delivery sys-

tem will mitigate the potential reduction in resources so that response times and the safety of the community can be maintained. In addition, the alternative to consolidation will be a massive reorganization and realignment of our current City fire services.

Will emergency medical response be affected?

Consolidation will improve medical response, which is an important benefit for all residents. The County is currently implementing a paramedic engine company response system that the City of San Leandro is now considering.

What does the current firefighting staff think of the merger?

The Firefighters' Association has not opposed the merger, but some members are concerned about potential changes in pay and benefits. The City and County are working with labor leaders to resolve these issues. We believe the Association will embrace this idea once they thoroughly review the details of the consolidation, especially in light of the increased safety equipment and service offered to all members of the community.

Is there more than one option for merging the services?

Yes. The San Leandro City Council has expressed interest in two options that would enable the City to retain control over service levels while also taking advantage of the benefits of merging service activities.

Option 1 is a full service contract that would result in a complete merger of City and County fire forces.

- City fire fighters and support staff would be transferred to and become employees of the County.
- The City would retain ownership of its fire stations and equipment, but would continue to dedicate these resources to the fire service.
- The City and County would enter into a multi-year contract, for example, five years.
- Through the contract, the County would commit to providing a specific level of service at least equal to current service levels and the City would pay the County fire district a negotiated price for the service.
- At the end of the contract period, the City could renew the contract, resume full service responsibility, or pursue other options.

Option 2 is a contract for management services only.

- Under this more limited contractual arrangement, the City would acquire management services from the County fire district for a negotiated price.
- Most City fire fighters would continue to serve as City employees.
- The City would retain general administrative responsibility for the department.
- For example, labor relations, human resource management, risk management, general accounting and payroll activities would continue to be a City responsibility.

Option 1 appears to deliver more comprehensive service and greater cost-saving benefits.

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CONSOLIDATION OF CITY AND COUNTY FIRE SERVICES

Will we still dial 911 in an emergency?

Yes. From the resident's point of view, everything about the current service will stay the same, including the method for calling for emergency service. A central dispatcher will deploy the closest emergency personnel and equipment. As a matter of fact, services will be enhanced significantly with the addition of Alameda County's Emergency Medical dispatching.

Will the City lose local control?

No. Under either of the two options being reviewed by the City Council, the City retains the ultimate right to control fire service. The City Council has expressed a concern about loss of direct control over service level and the service program if City and County fire services are merged. This potential disadvantage can be mitigated in several ways. For example:

- City officials could be placed on an advisory or governing board depending on how consolidation occurs. Specific service level standards will be agreed upon prior to consolidation.
- The City can retain ownership of its fire equipment/apparatus and fire stations.
- The City and County can enter into a contract for shared service delivery.
- Specific service level and performance standards can be set forth in the contract. In the event of non-performance, this contract could be terminated at any time.

Can the County provide the same quality of service currently enjoyed by the citizens of San Leandro?

Yes. The Alameda County Fire Department is a modern, well managed organization. It has a long history of successful consolidations with smaller agencies that have consistently improved services and reduced the cost of protection for their citizens. The County's funding for fire services is protected by state law from budget cuts at the local county level.

What's the next step?

The City Council must decide what level of consolidation, if any, should occur between City and County fire services. The City Council is committed to receiving public input on this proposal and will involve the community to receive your thoughts. Contracts will be negotiated with the County and with all involved personnel. The actual transition can be managed with relative ease.

What kind of issues are of concern to you? To share your thoughts or to receive more information, call the City Manager's Office at 577-3351.